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TO: SPORT FISHERIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FROM: FISHERIES SERVICE

DATE: 2/1/2010

UPDATE ON 2010 BLACK SEA BASS TOTAL ALLOWABLE LANDINGS*

The revised Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) requires that the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (MAFMC) adopt recommendations of the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) for annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC). Prior to the revised MSA, the Monitoring Committee (MC) made recommendations regarding the TAC to the MAFMC.

In July 2009, the SSC met and recommended a 2010 black sea bass TAC without having input from the Black Sea Bass Monitoring Committee (MC). The SSC voted to maintain a reduced TAC in 2010 based on considerable uncertainty in the black sea bass stock assessment. Based on this recommendation, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) enacted a final rule in the Federal Register adopting the 2010 Total Allowable Landings (TAL). By August 2009, the recreational harvest of black sea bass along the Atlantic coast was significantly higher than in previous years, despite an increased size limit for 2009. Because of this elevated harvest, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Black Sea Bass Management Board convened an emergency meeting via webinar to discuss potential action in response to the high 2009 harvest. At this meeting, the ASMFC voted not to close the recreational black sea bass fishery in state waters. However, NMFS proceeded to close fisheries in federal waters in October 2009. This federal closure will remain in effect through April 2010. Nearly all of Maryland's recreational black sea bass fishery occurs on headboats in federal waters. By contrast, the states with the highest 2009 recreational harvest estimates have significant fisheries in state waters.

Projections indicate that the 2010 recreational black sea bass harvest will need to be 66% less than the 2009 harvest in order to meet the TAC recommended by the SSC in July 2009. In December 2009, the MAFMC and the ASMFC voted jointly to meet the 66% reduction by limiting the 2010 season to June 1-30 and September 1-30. At the same meeting in December, the MAFMC motioned that the SSC review their recommendation based on information not available in July and including input from the MC. In January 2010, the SSC met jointly with the MC via webinar and recommended to increase the TAC for 2010. The chair of the MAFMC has provided NMFS with a recommended action based on the SSC's revised TAC (see attached letter). With a TAC already in place through a final rule, NMFS can only adjust the 2010 TAL to meet the SSC recommendations if there are emergency conditions.

Should NMFS enact an emergency rule, increasing the 2010 TAL, the seasons will expand. If the TAL increases, the 2010 harvest reduction would be 44%. At the February 2 meeting of ASMFC's Summer Flounder, Black Sea Bass, and Scup Management Board, they will consider coast-wide options for increasing the season if the TAL is increased. The same information will be reviewed at the February 11th MAFMC Summer Flounder, Black Sea Bass, and Scup Management Board meeting.

***Total Allowable Landings = Total Allowable Catch - Discards**

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